



# School Resource Officers

## Public Perspectives and Perceptions

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An Overview



# COPS IN SCHOOLS

# History

- The concept of an SRO varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction
  - Unifying element: sworn police officers
- Police began appearing in schools in mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century
  - Indianapolis, Los Angeles
- High-profile incidents of school violence in 1990s produced surge in SROs

# A Federal Government Creation

- SRO movement largely the result of Federal initiatives
- Office of Community Oriented Policing (COPS)
  - **COPS in Schools** program
    - First round of funding: 1999
    - Most recent round of funding: 2005
    - \$753 million to 3,000 grantees
      - Hiring of 6,500 SROs nationwide
  - **Safe Schools/Healthy Students** program
    - \$10 million
      - Additional 100 SROs

# Purpose

- It depends...
  - Safety, safety, safety
- NASRO “Triad” Model
  - Law enforcement
  - Counselor
  - Educator
- Substantively different than other police responsibilities
  - The nature of the context is drastically different
  - A custodial population

# Evidence

- SRO programs are notorious for not collecting rigorous, systematic process or outcome data
- Objective dimension
  - Scant empirical evidence that SRO programs achieve their delinquency/crime reduction goals
- Subjective dimension
  - Students, faculty, staff, and parents tend to support SRO programs

Anchorage

# SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER PROGRAM

*“Ensuring the safety of your school.”*



# Overview of Program

- Initiated in **May 2003**
  - First full term: Q1 2003-2004 school year
- Paid for by Anchorage Police Department
  - Anchorage School District provides office space, supplies
- 16 SROs (plus 2 supervisors)
  - 8 high, 8 middle, 78 elementary schools
- **Not** a “security” force
  - ASD has its own security force



# Goals

- Enhance safety of school, surrounding area
- Reduce juvenile crime
- Increase school attendance
- Build trust with students
- Provide “high level of police service”

# Research Questions

- Is the public **familiar with the idea** of a school resource officer program?
- Does the public **perceive a need** for a school resource officer program?
- Is there **public support** for a school resource officer program?
- To what extent is there **skepticism** about a school resource officer program?

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# SAMPLE

# Demographics

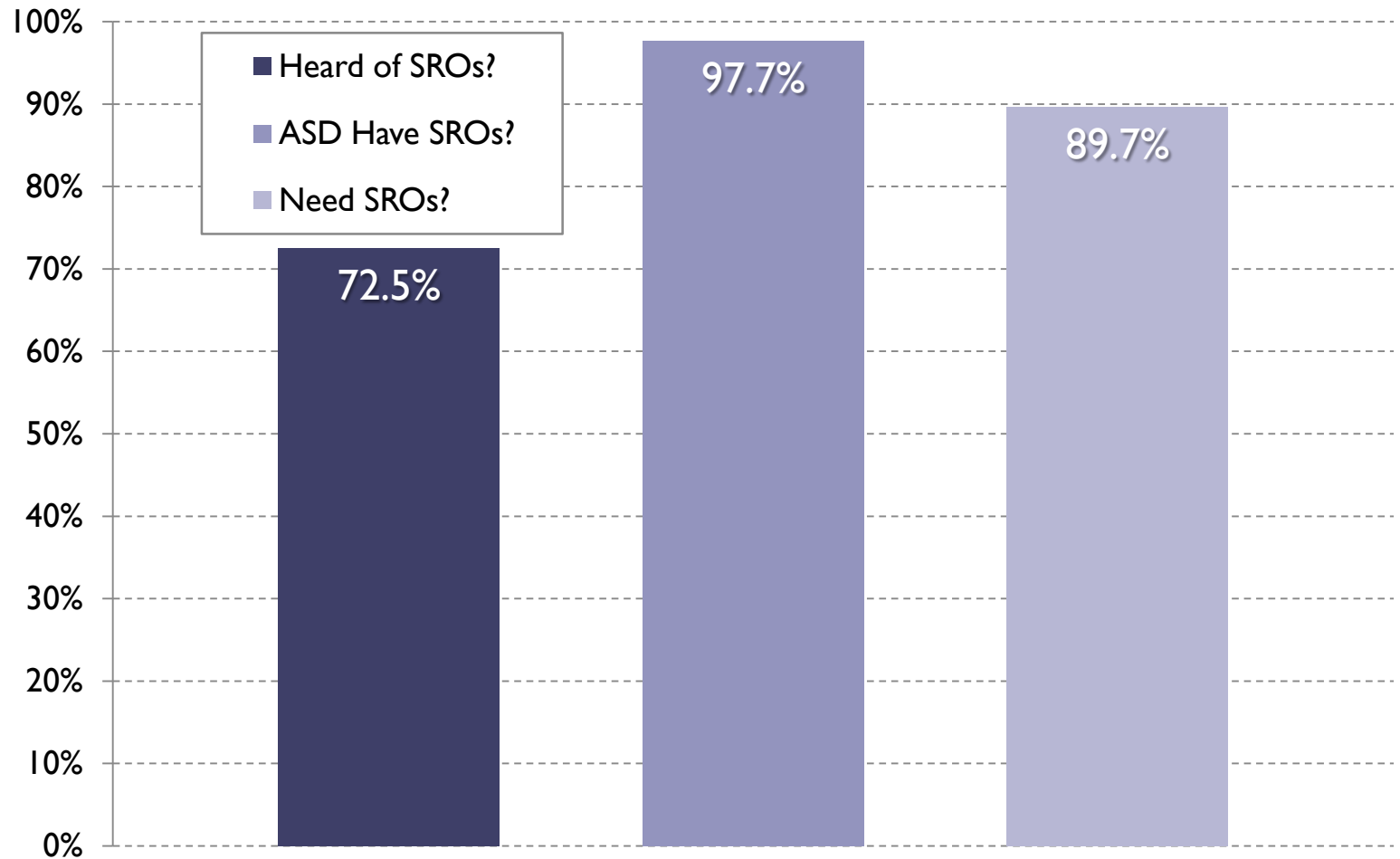
- **Preliminary Data!**
- 817 adult respondents
  - Expected:  $\approx$  2,000
- Not a representative sample of Anchorage adults...
  - Sample weights not used in this analysis
  - Future analyses will correct for sampling bias

Characteristic	Min-Max	Mean
Parent of ASD child	0-1	.298
Age	18-94	49.1
Race (white)	0-1	.813
Hispanic origin (yes)	0-1	.055
Gender (male)	0-1	.486
Marital Status (married)	0-1	.701
Veteran (yes)	0-1	.216
Education (m/t HS)	0-1	.844
Employment (employed)	0-1	.642
Household income (median)	\$75k-\$99.9k	



# **FAMILIARITY & PERCEIVED NEED**

# Perceived Awareness & Need

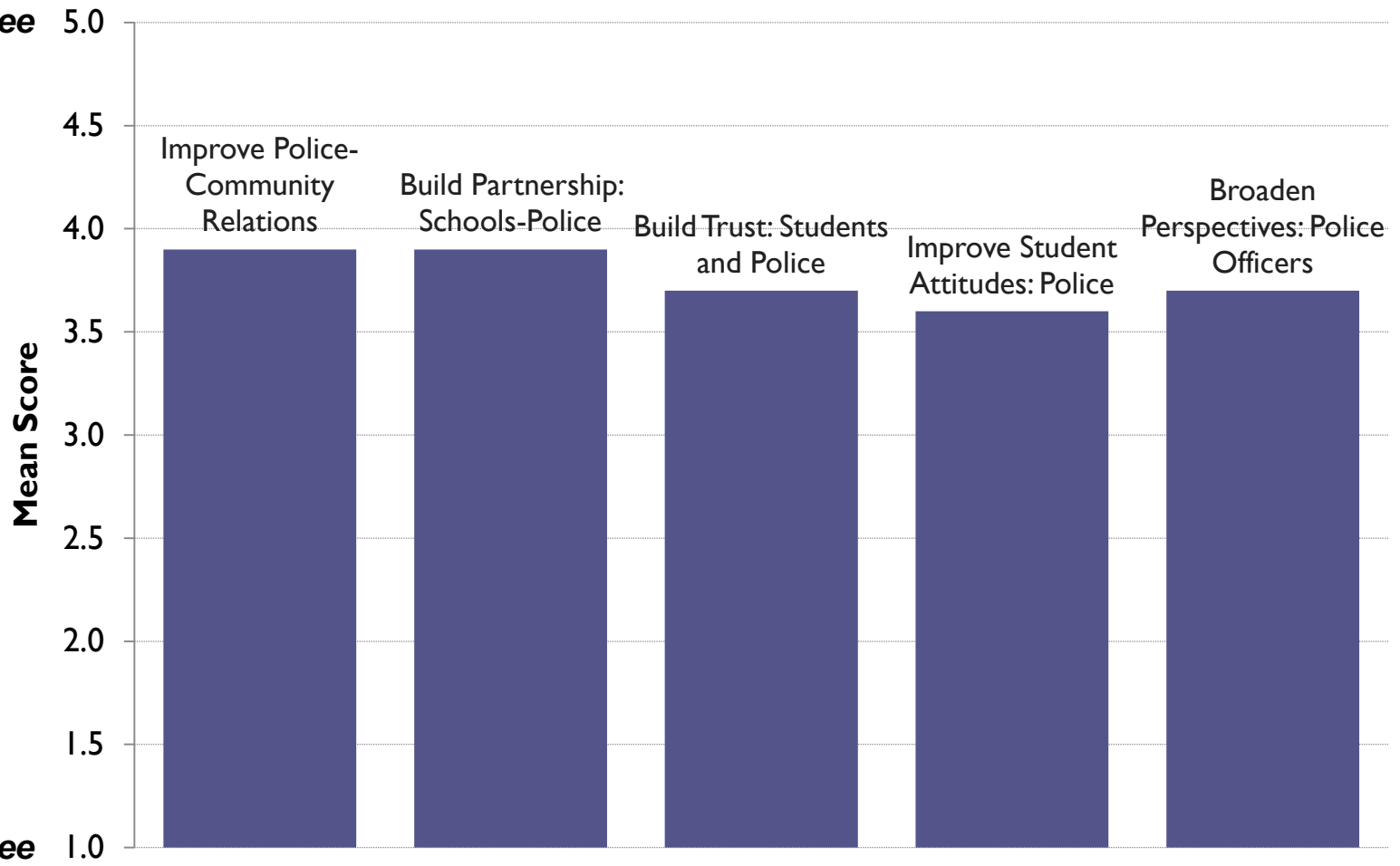


Support for SRO Program



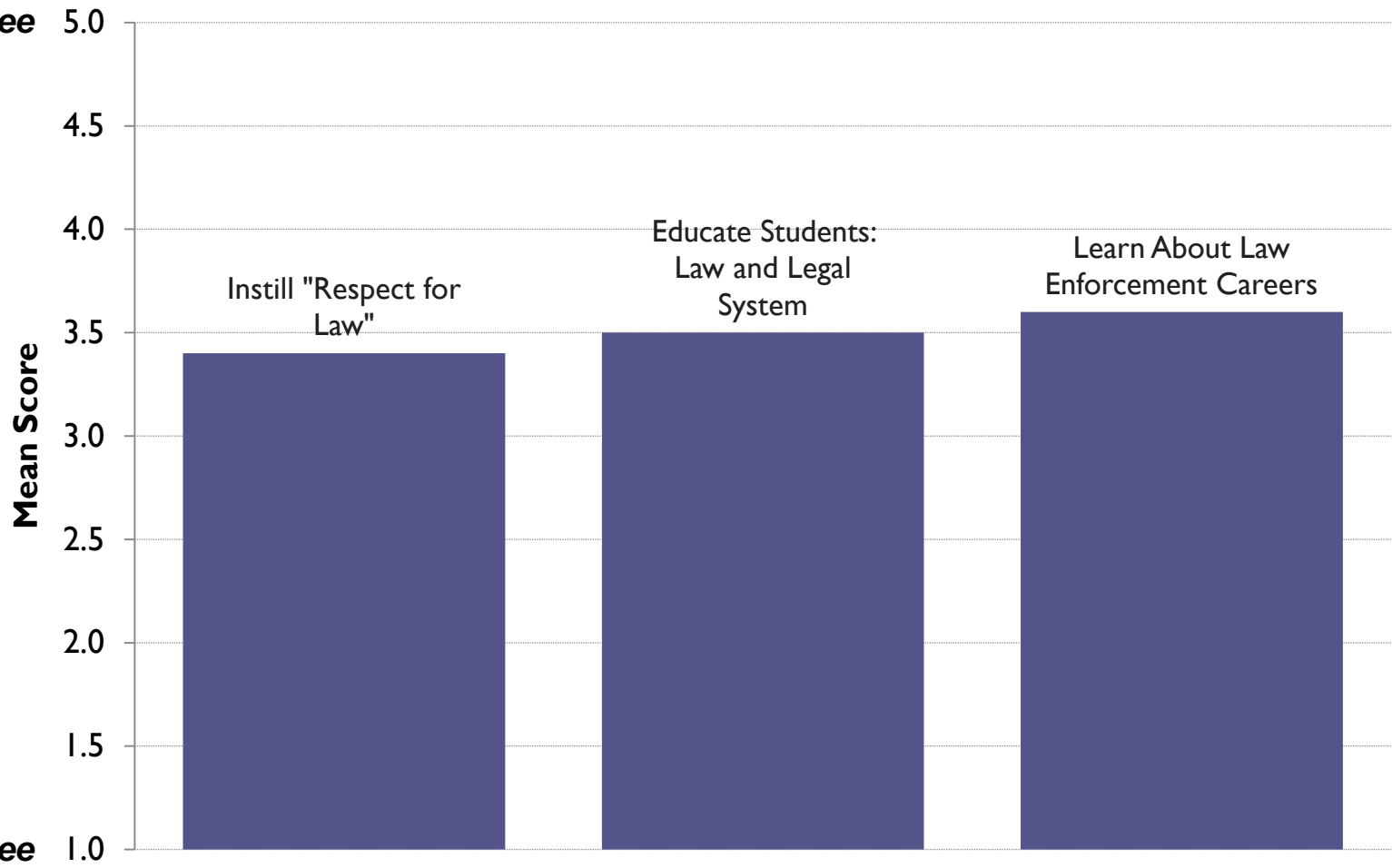
# **ASSIGNING POLICE TO SCHOOLS IS A GOOD WAY TO...**

# Police-Public Relations

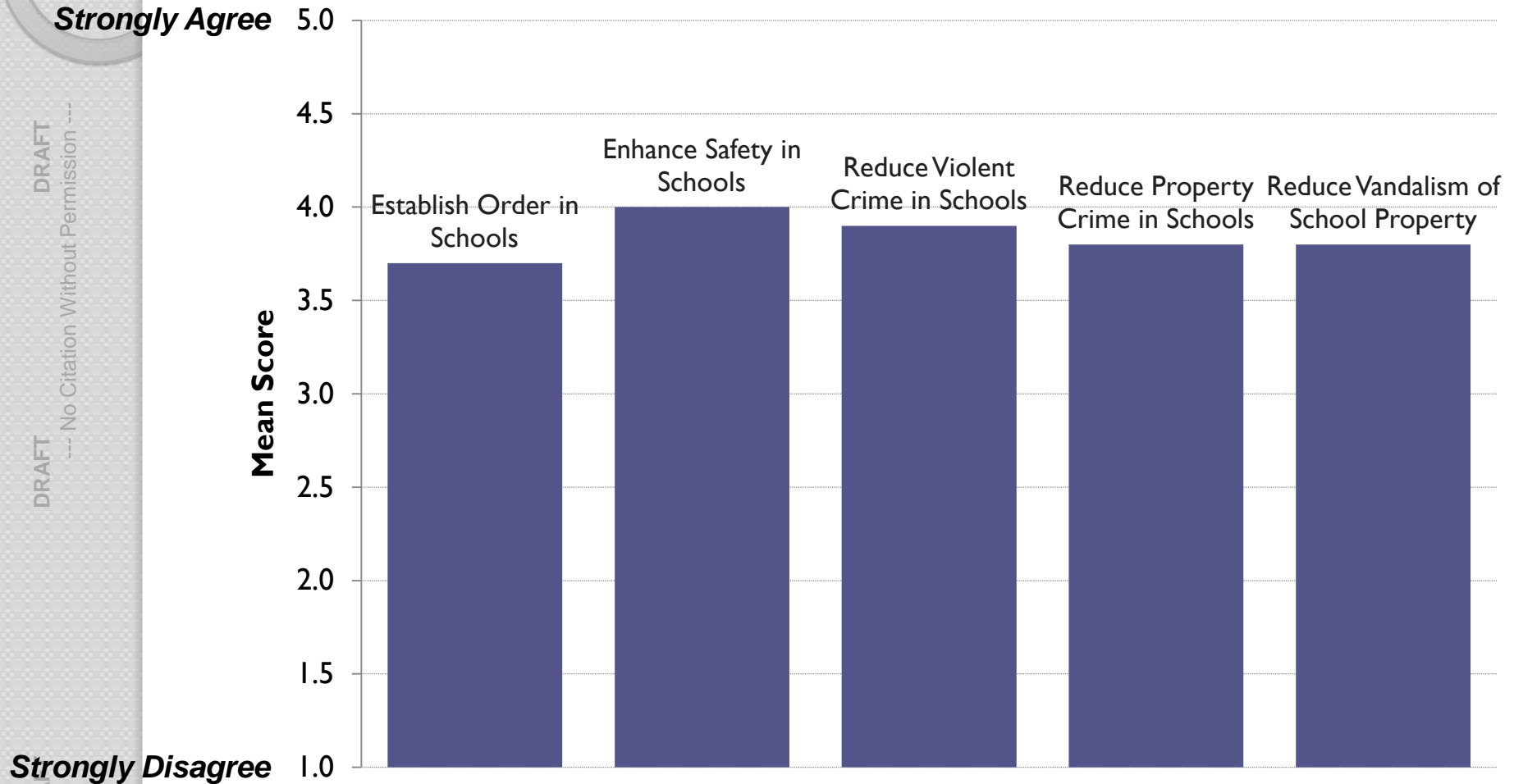




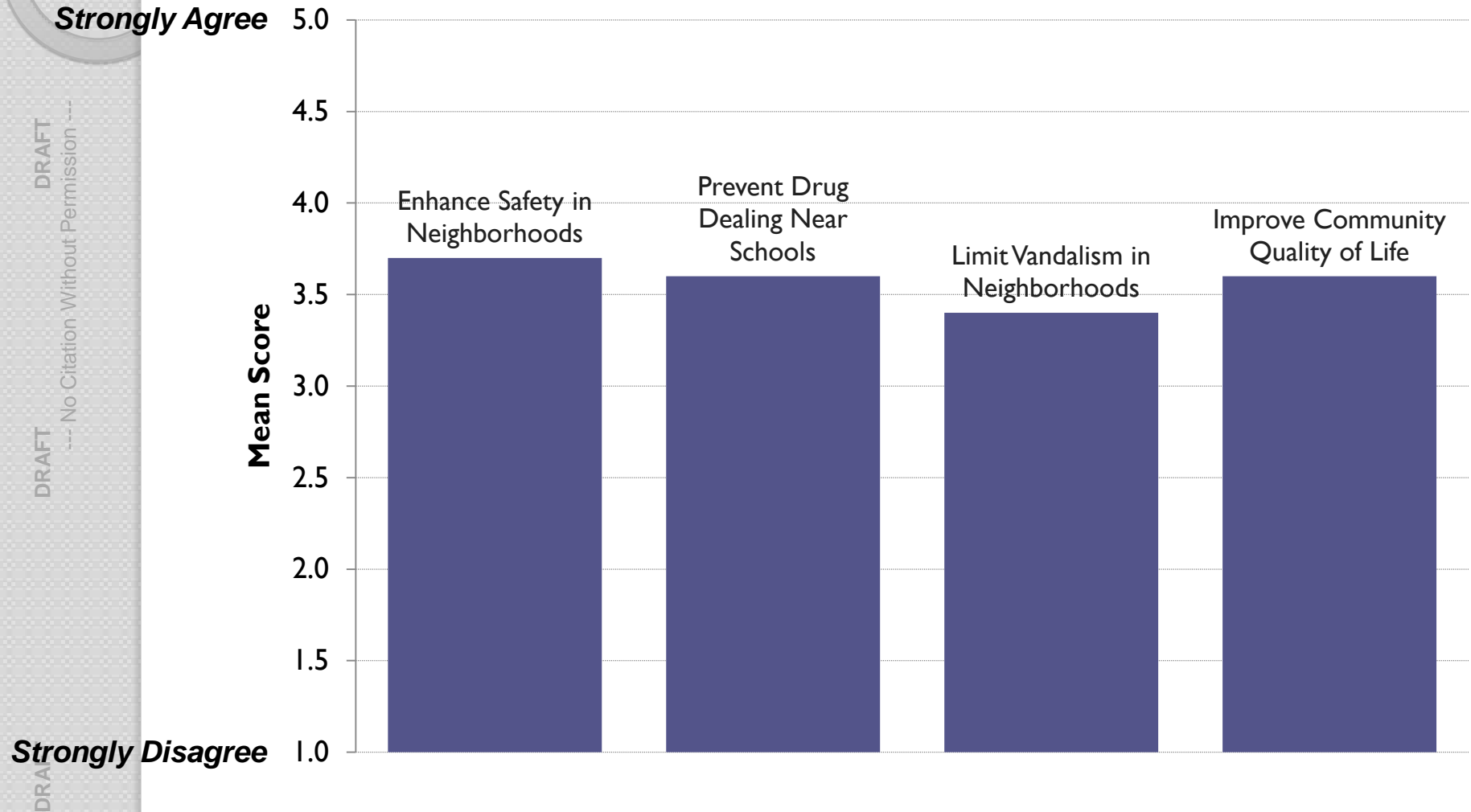
# Educate Students



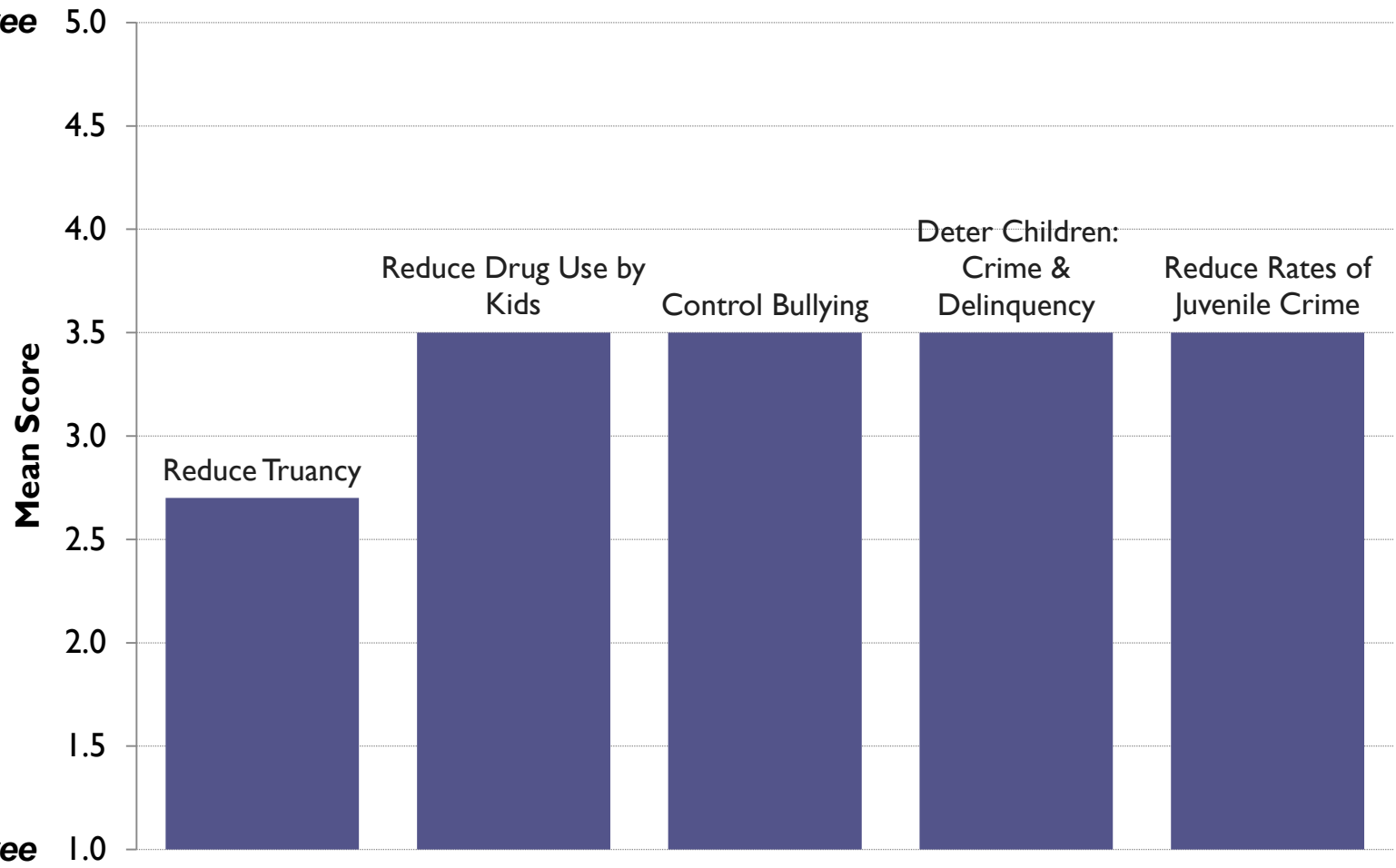
# Improve School Safety



# Improve Neighborhood Safety



# Reduce Juvenile Delinquency



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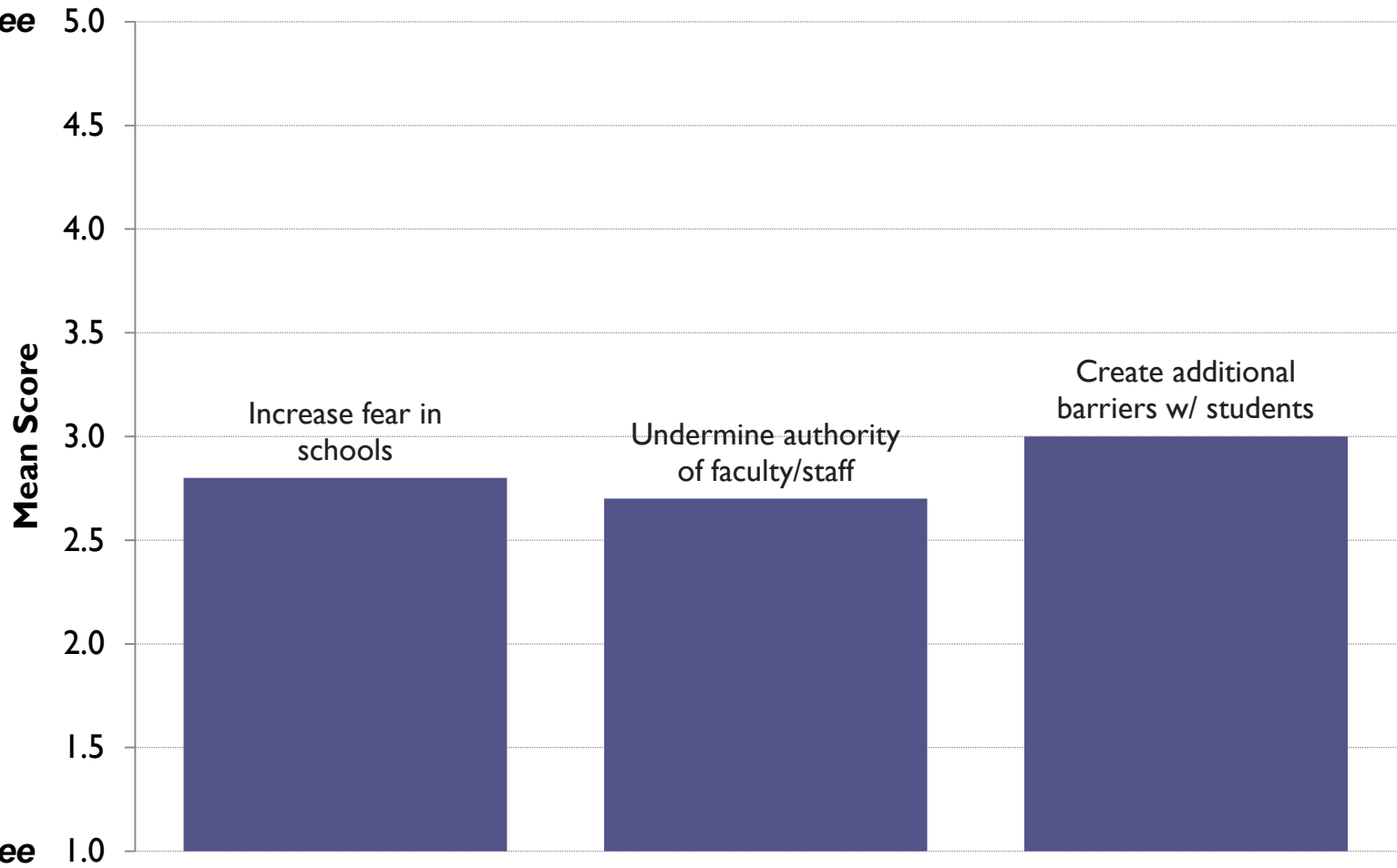
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# **CONCERNS ABOUT S.R.O. PROGRAM**

# Potential Downside to SROs



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Univariate Analyses

# A SUMMARY

# Public Perceptions of SROs

- High level of awareness of SRO concept
- High level of awareness of SRO program
- Public perceives a need for SRO program in Anchorage
- Faith in the ability of the SROs to:
  - Improve police-public relations
  - Enhance safety of schools
  - Improve safety of neighborhoods
  - Reduce juvenile delinquency
  - Educate students about policing, legal system
- SRO program is not overly problematic in the eyes of the public



How Do Demographics Shape Perceptions?



# BIVARIATE ANALYSIS

# Bivariate Analyses

**Table I. Bivariate Correlations**

SRO Goal Scales vs. Respondent Demographic Characteristics

GOALS	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
<b>Schl. Safety</b>	-.001	.092**	.004	-.076*	-.024	-.005	-.003	.042	-.066	-.006
<b>Comm. Safety</b>	-.024	.151***	-.020	-.078*	-.022	-.018	.002	.053	-.083*	-.026
<b>Relationships</b>	-.013	.163***	.009	-.085*	.000	-.033	-.003	.043	-.080*	-.029
<b>Delinquency</b>	-.013	.171***	-.037	-.058	-.076*	-.022	-.022	.044	-.097**	-.042
<b>Education</b>	-.004	.133***	-.055	-.030	-.011	-.023	-.052	.009	-.054	-.040
<b>Downside</b>	-.031	.064	-.115**	-.016	.063	-.060	.050	-.090*	-.100**	-.045

**NOTES:**

Parent (A), Age (B), Race (C), Hispanic (D), Gender (E), Marital Status (F), Veteran (G), Education (H), Employment (I), Income (J).

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

# Summary

- **Demographic variables of interest**
  - **Age**
    - Most consistent of all demographic characteristics
    - Older people have greater confidence
  - **Employment**
    - Those currently employed consistently **more skeptical** of SRO goals
  - **Gender**
    - Men are consistently more skeptical of SRO goals, though not always *significantly* more skeptical

# Summary

- **Demographic variables of interest**
  - **Race**
    - Only significantly related to possible negative effects of SRO program
      - Non-whites more sensitive to possible negative outcomes
  - **Education**
    - Only significantly related to possible negative effects of SRO program
      - Changed direction! (negative)
  - **Gender**
    - Only significant for perceptions of delinquency
      - Men more dubious than women

# Summary

- **Null variables**
  - **Parental of ASD student**
  - **Marital status**
  - **Veteran**
  - **Household income**

# Future Research

- **What other factors impact public confidence in SRO program?**
  - Do effects of demographic variables persist upon control for:
    - Community crime rates
    - Community disorder
    - Perceptions of neighborhood safety
    - Collective efficacy
    - Criminal justice efficacy
    - Fear of juvenile crime
    - Prior experiences with police